

§ 401.125

20 CFR Ch. III (4–1–12 Edition)

§ 401.125 Disclosures prohibited by law.

We do not disclose information when a law specifically prohibits it. The Internal Revenue Code generally prohibits us from disclosing tax return information which we receive to maintain individual earnings records. This includes, for example, amounts of wages and contributions from employers. Other laws restrict our disclosure of certain information about drug and alcohol abuse which we collect to determine eligibility for social security benefits.

§ 401.130 Freedom of Information Act.

The FOIA requires us to disclose any information in our records upon request from the public, unless one of several exemptions in the FOIA applies. When the FOIA requires disclosure (see part 402 of this chapter), the Privacy Act permits it. *The public* does not include Federal agencies, courts, or the Congress, but does include State agencies, individuals, corporations, and most other parties. The FOIA does not apply to requests that are not from *the public* (e.g., from a Federal agency). However, we apply FOIA principles to requests from these other sources for disclosure of program information.

§ 401.135 Other laws.

When the FOIA does not apply, we may not disclose any personal information unless both the Privacy Act and section 1106 of the Social Security Act permit the disclosure. Section 1106 of the Social Security Act requires that disclosures which may be made must be set out in statute or regulations; therefore, any disclosure permitted by this part is permitted by section 1106.

§ 401.140 General principles.

When no law specifically requiring or prohibiting disclosure applies to a question of whether to disclose information, we follow FOIA principles to resolve that question. We do this to insure uniform treatment in all situations. The FOIA principle which most often applies to SSA disclosure questions is whether the disclosure would result in a “clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.” To decide whether a disclosure would be a clearly

unwarranted invasion of personal privacy we consider—

(a) The sensitivity of the information (e.g., whether individuals would suffer harm or embarrassment as a result of the disclosure);

(b) The public interest in the disclosure;

(c) The rights and expectations of individuals to have their personal information kept confidential;

(d) The public’s interest in maintaining general standards of confidentiality of personal information; and

(e) The existence of safeguards against unauthorized redisclosure or use.

§ 401.145 Safeguards against unauthorized redisclosure or use.

(a) The FOIA does not authorize us to impose any restrictions on how information is used after we disclose it under that law. In applying FOIA principles, we consider whether the information will be adequately safeguarded against improper use or redisclosure. We must consider all the ways in which the recipient might use the information and how likely the recipient is to redisclose the information to other parties. Thus, before we disclose personal information we may consider such factors as—

(1) Whether only those individuals who have a need to know the information will obtain it;

(2) Whether appropriate measures to safeguard the information to avoid unwarranted use or misuse will be taken; and

(3) Whether we would be permitted to conduct on-site inspections to see whether the safeguards are being met.

(b) We feel that there is a strong public interest in sharing information with other agencies with programs having the same or similar purposes, so we generally share information with those agencies. However, since there is usually little or no public interest in disclosing information for disputes between two private parties or for other private or commercial purposes, we generally do not share information for these purposes.